

**TESTIMONY OF KEVIN PRATT**

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**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON**

**DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**ON**

**FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY COMPENSATION FUND:**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY OF**

**PROCESS FOR VERIFYING ELGIBILITY**

**NOVEMBER 20, 2014**

Good morning Chairman Runyan, Ranking Member Titus, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for calling this hearing and for your continuing efforts to recognize the extraordinary contributions of Filipino veterans, including those who served in guerrilla units, for the service they provided in support of the United States during World War II. I am delivering testimony on behalf of the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC or Center) that is similar to a statement delivered by the NPRC Director, Scott Levins, in a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee earlier this year. As one of many veterans that work at the NPRC, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the work that the Center does to serve those who have served. We appreciate your interest in this important work.

The NPRC is an office of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Located in two facilities in the St. Louis, Missouri area, the Center stores and services over 4 million cubic feet of military and civilian personnel, medical and related records dating back to the Spanish-American War.

**History of NPRC's Military Records Program**

In the mid 1950s, the Department of Defense (DoD) constructed the Military Personnel Records Center in Overland, Missouri. In the years that followed, military personnel, medical, and organizational records of each military service department were relocated to this facility. In

1960, the Center's functions were consolidated and transferred to the General Services Administration (GSA), to be managed by the National Archives, which at that time was a part of GSA. The Archives managed the Center as a single program, leveraging economies of scale to improve efficiency and offering a central point of access for military service records.

In spring 2011, the NPRC began moving its military records into a new building designed to meet updated facility standards for storing permanent Federal records. The facility is located in North St. Louis County, approximately 15 miles from the Overland location. The relocation of records into the new facility was completed in 2012.

NPRC holds approximately 60 million official military personnel files. Its holdings also include service treatment records, clinical records from military medical treatment facilities, auxiliary records such as pay vouchers and service name indexes, and organizational records such as morning reports and unit rosters. NPRC stores these records in both textual and micrographic formats.

NPRC's military records facility receives approximately 4,000 correspondence requests each day from veterans, their next of kin, various Federal agencies, members of Congress, the media, and other stakeholders. Nearly half of these requests come from veterans seeking a copy of their separation statement (the DD-214) because they need it to pursue a benefit. The Center responds to over 90% of these types of requests in ten business days or less.

In addition to the correspondence work discussed above, the Center normally receives between 5,000 and 10,000 requests each week from the VA and other Federal agencies requiring the temporary loan of original records. These requests are normally serviced within 2-3 business days.

### **Philippine Army Records**

Included in the NPRC's holdings are claim folders pertaining to Filipino nationals that were adjudicated by the U.S. Army after World War II, and unit rosters created by the U.S. Army in conjunction with its post-war recognition program. In 1998 NARA entered into an agreement with the Department of the Army to accept the physical transfer of these records though they remain in the legal custody of the Department of the Army. Also as part of the agreement, beginning in FY 1999, NPRC assumed the responsibility for referencing these records consistent with procedures previously established by the Army. In doing so, NPRC reviews its holdings to authenticate service determinations previously made by the Department of the Army. NPRC does this by examining claim folders, finding aids, and a variety of rosters compiled by the Army during its post-war recognition program. Most often, this is done in response to requests from the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding compensation claims. Recognizing the urgency of these requests, NPRC strives to respond to these requests in ten business days or less.

The technical instructions applied by NPRC technicians in referencing these records and responding to such requests have been furnished to the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans and has been posted online for public viewing at <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/memo-1865125.html>. The instructions are consistent with the longstanding policies

and practices of the Department of the Army and were applied by Army staff prior to the transfer of the reference function to NPRC. On multiple occasions since the establishment of the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund, officials from the Department of the Army have visited NPRC, reviewed its technical instructions, examined its work process, and confirmed that NPRC was providing reference services consistent with the long established policies and practices of the Department of the Army.

NARA has also preserved records of historical value documenting events that transpired in the Philippines during and after World War II. Included are records describing actions taken by the U.S. Army to recognize the service of Filipino nationals who supported the United States Army Forces in the Far East, including those who served in guerrilla units. These records are available for public review at the National Archives building in College Park, Maryland.

## **Conclusion**

NARA is pleased to work with the Subcommittee, the Army, the VA, and other stakeholders to ensure Filipino veterans, including those who served in recognized guerrilla units, are recognized for their extraordinary service in support of the United States during World War II. We have briefed interested congressional staff and other stakeholders on NARA's role in this process, we actively participated in an Interagency Working Group established by the White House to analyze the process, and we have shared information with Filipino veterans advocacy groups to help provide greater understanding of the reference process we employ to authenticate service determinations made by the Department of the Army. Working with the Department of the Army, we modified our response letters to provide more specific details regarding our reference results in instances where we are unable to positively authenticate a prior service determination, and, at the suggestion of the White House Interagency Working Group, we digitized and posted online a report titled, "U.S. Army Recognition Program of Philippine Guerrillas." This report, which can be found at <http://research.archives.gov/description/6921767>, explains how the recognition process was developed at the close of World War II.

We again extend our thanks to the Subcommittee for expressing such great interest in the role that NPRC provides in this important process. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.